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Domitian, Justinian and Peter the Great: The Ambivalent Iconography of the Mounted King

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I. The Ruler-Charioteer

Ἔγρεο, Κωνσταντίνε· τί χάλκεον ὕπνον ἰαύεις;
σεῖο δίφρους ποθέει δῆμος ἐνὶ σταδίοις,
σῆς τε διδασκαλίας ἐπιδευέες ἡνιοχῆς
εἵεται ὀρφανικοῖς παισὶν ὁμοιώτατοι.

Rulers as chariot drivers are familiar from Egypt. In the fourteenth century B.C. they were already a topos. Arpag Mekhitarian notes of a coffer showing an ailing monarch in horsy company:

The chariot we reproduce figures in a battle-scene: a subject banned in the days of the pacifist king Akhenaten, but in high favor under the new régime—though that poor consumptive Tutankhamen had hardly strength enough to drag himself about the palace gardens. Against the ivory-yellow ground the pair of huge red horses with their decorative plumes and streamers, black and yellow caparisons, are trampling down the defeated Syrians. . . . The Pharaoh is majestic power incarnate. . . . The ardor of the fray is well conveyed by the galloping horses, a massive diagonal slashing through the tangled mass of combatants.¹

Whether the Egyptian painting was intended in some way to combat and deny the youthful Pharaoh's mortal illness (d. 1350) is not clear, although it was of course found in his tomb. But eventually the chariot was, as the story of Elijah shows, a means to overcome death itself.² The

¹ See "Battle Scene: Tutankhamen Fighting the Syrians," from a decorated coffer preserved in Cairo, in *Egyptian Painting*, text by Arpag Mekhitarian (Skira, Geneva 1954), p. 118. The quotation is drawn from the commentary on pp. 121–23.

² This is why Virgil shows the blessed dead as engaged in athletics: *arma procul currusque virum miratur inanis*, *Aen.* VI. 651: cf. E. Norden's note on 653, referring to Pindar and to

Byzantines cherished this old idea. A tenth-century seal now in the Hermitage bears on its reverse a picture of the Ascension of Alexander the Great. Quite unlike the traditional iconography of the Ascension of Christ, he is shown standing in a chariot drawn by two winged griffins, and holding in either hand a bar to which the bait is attached.³ A silver bowl dating from the twelfth century, also in Leningrad, shows this scene in company with eleven others, arranged under arches,⁴ that include a musician, two figures of mounted riders and a dancing girl. On another twelfth-century bowl "musicians, dancers, acrobats" and others surround no longer an earthly champion, but a mounted St. George.⁵

The religious connection between the ruler and the victory-bringing chariot of the circus (hippodrome), so evident in Byzantine art and ceremony,⁶ has therefore deep roots, in the near East generally, but also in the Greco-Roman past. Everyone will immediately think of Nero.⁷ But Syracusan coinage both of the Deinomenids and later had exploited the concept of the chariot of state used also by Plato, and comically suggested by Aristophanes.⁸ In Greek poetry, the association is at least as old, for

Herodotus VI. 103. The Etruscan "Tomba delle Bighe" and the chariot rescued from an Etruscan tomb and carefully reconstructed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, are also relevant.

³ A. Grabar, "Images de l'Ascension d'Alexandre en Italie et en Russie," in *L'art de la fin de l'antiquité et du Moyen Âge* (Paris 1968), vols. 1, pp. 295-96; 3, pl. 66 a, b: Bank (below, note 5), p. 301.

⁴ The arch (*fornix*) has a sure place in the history of morals: Horace, *Sat.* I. 2. 30; Juv. XI. 173. Fornication was particularly associated with the Circus: *Priapea* 26. 1.

⁵ Alice Bank, *Byzantine Art in the Collections of Soviet Museums* (enlarged ed., Leningrad 1985), plates 213-17 with her remarks on pp. 310-11.

⁶ K. M. D. Dunbabin, "The Victorious Charioteer on Mosaics and Related Monuments," *American Journal of Archaeology* 86 (1982), 85-86; M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory. Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge 1986), *passim*. Alice Bank writes of a relief with circus scenes from circa 500 preserved in Leningrad: "The piece is likely to have been used as a chancel-screen in a church" (*op. cit.*, p. 273 on plates 13 and 14). This association of Church and Circus survived in Kiev: Grabar (above, note 3), I, pp. 251 ff., "Les Fresques des Escaliers à Sainte-Sophie de Kiev et l'Iconographie Impériale Byzantine," esp. 255 ff. (cf. also p. 648); Christa Schug-Wille, *Art of the Byzantine World*, tr. E. M. Hatt (New York 1969), pp. 236-37. A Jewish midrash mentioned by K. Krumbacher describes Solomon's Hippodrome at Jerusalem with the participation of the four factions: *Geschichte der byzantinischen Litteratur* (repr. New York 1970), I, p. 33 with note 1. It was impossible to imagine a royal court in any other terms. A similar bias inspires the attribution of a theatre to Charlemagne's New Rome at Aachen: *Anonymus de Carolo Magno et Leone Papa*, vv. 104-05. But Virgil had already described Dido's theatre at Carthage (*Aen.* I. 427).

⁷ Cf. (among much other material) Tacitus, *Ann.* XV. 44: *circense ludicrum edebat, habitu aurigae permixtus plebi vel curriculo insistsens*. More generally, for the association ruler / festivities, compare Nero himself on Britannicus: *Ann.* XIII. 15; and Seneca on Claudius, *Apocol.* 8. 2 (*Saturnalicus princeps*).

⁸ M. Kraay and M. Hirmer, *Greek Coins* (New York 1966), plates 23-27; Plato, *Rep.* VIII. 566d: cf. Aristophanes, *Knights* 1109 and 1128; *Ecclesiazusae* 466.

example, as Pindar's second *Pythian* (468 B.C.?). That ode contrasts what may be called King Hiero's "chivalry," his gentle governance of his horses, with the wild savagery of the lawless Centaurs, horse / men of a far different breed. Hiero, master of horses, victor in the hippodrome, favorite and indeed double of Zeus, ruled Syracuse, according to Pindar, with gentleness that called for "gentle requitals."⁹ But even the hospitable Zeus was betrayed by his guest Ixion, now punished forever on his revolving wheel in a parody of the revolving wheels that have just brought victory to the king. Hiero too was faced with uncomprehending opposition. The ode itself is the best evidence of his dilemmas. In a dialogue with his enemies, he is made to describe himself as a "cork," always bobbing above the brine. But his self-mockery cannot mask a ruthless resolution to deal with his foes, if they prove recalcitrant, as they deserve.¹⁰

Hiero, ailing (like Tutankhamen), suspicious, cruel, died in 466 B.C., and his dynasty fell from power soon after. The dialogue and self-justification of this "Hippodromic" poem already contain the germ of the Nika riots and their aftermath, and more generally of all those Circus encounters between people and ruler so characteristic of imperial Rome.¹¹ It was appropriate that the leader and champion of the social group, eventually the king, should play this role in this setting. The hippodrome / stadium / circus, the model and microcosm of the wheeling universe, is the locus of *agon* with and triumph over death, and Pindar's odes stand in a komic (comic) tradition acknowledging this fact.¹² The Olympic Games were celebrated at the tomb of Pelops, who thus acquires the only immortality possible for man, just as the funeral games of Patroclus or Anchises were the token and proof of those heroes' continuity. The Roman Circus, where after the conspiracy of Piso Nero gave thanks for his survival to the Sun,¹³ whose circling motion the terrestrial course represented, harbored also the shrine of Consus, god of the harvest home but also of the underworld. The

⁹ τὸν εὐεργέταν ἀγαναῖς ἀμοιβαῖς ἐποικομένους τίνεσθαι, 24. The *gnome* is couched in general terms, but obviously applies to Hiero (cf. ἀγαναῖσιν ἐν χειρσί, 8), whose brother Gelon had already been saluted as εὐεργέτης, σωτήρ and βασιλεὺς at Syracuse (Diod. Sic. XI. 26. 5-6).

¹⁰ This interpretation is developed in J. K. Newman / F. S. Newman, *Pindar's Art* (Hildesheim 1984), pp. 215 ff.

¹¹ L. Friedlaender, *Darstellungen aus der Sittengeschichte Roms II* (10th ed., Leipzig 1922), pp. 7-8: for the earlier period, T. Bollinger, *Theatralis Licentia: die Publikumsdemonstrationen an den öffentlichen Spielen im Rom der früheren Kaiserzeit und ihre Bedeutung im politischen Leben* (Winterthur 1969).

¹² A theme particularly noticeable in *Ol.* 10: cf. τὸν ἐγκώμιον ἀμφὶ τρόπον, v. 77; *Pindar's Art*, pp. 200 ff. Alcestis is brought back from the dead in Euripides' play precisely by a comic Heracles who claims that he won her in an athletic *agon* (1026-27).

¹³ Tac., *Ann.* XV. 74: *propriusque honos Soli, cui est vetus aedes apud Circum in quo facinus parabatur.*

triple cones that marked the turning point or *meta* were borrowed by the Romans from Etruscan *funerary* monuments.¹⁴

Laughter and mockery are part of this complex of usages, since laughter is the token of birth and resurrection.¹⁵ The primitive community laughs at what it means to preserve, as Old Comedy in Athens and satire in Rome attest. The right of Circus freedom (παρρησία¹⁶) is well established. Criticism of rulers as part of this right and rite is a theme familiar in Rome both Old and New. This is why it was proper for a victorious charioteer and king, Hiero, through Pindar, to air his differences in a dialogue with his enemies in the second *Pythian*, and because of that airing to pose as confident of survival.¹⁷

II. The Ruler-Knight

The ambiguities attending the concept of the ruler-charioteer, straddling the two realms of death and life, are already apparent. They extend to the "knightly" ruler or prince. This is a notion familiar to Homer, where it is especially associated with Nestor.¹⁸ But how telling that there should already be about it some air, however faint, of laughter, ridicule. The garrulous Nestor, living on his past, a walking example of vertical time, too old for the realities of combat, is bound to be a figure of fun, as indeed Don Quixote de la Mancha (1605, 1615) would be centuries later. Ariosto had earlier exploited this same ambivalence in his *Orlando Furioso* (final version 1532).¹⁹ A history of "chivalry," ancient or medieval, would evidently provide an inexhaustible theme. What an odd development for the humble word *caballus*, and yet how in keeping with this lowly etymology that this ideal should so often carry some suggestion of the fool. But worse than this. The fool, to the unsympathetic eye, easily slips into the role of knave. Even the ambivalence Knecht / Knight therefore illustrates something of the same duplicity, the rejected (evil) and the ideal sides of the one concept.

¹⁴ John H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses* (London 1986), p. 255 (quoted below, note 48); cf. Tertullian, *De Spect.* (ed. E. Castorina [Florence 1961]), 9 (games as microcosm): Pindar, *Ol.* 1. 90 ff. (tomb of Pelops): Callimachus, fr. 384. 30 Pf.: ταφίων . . . πανηγυρίων.

¹⁵ OT Genesis 18:12; 21:3 (Isaac = "He laughed"): cf. the rite of *risus paschalis*: M. Bakhtin, *Творчество Франсуа Рабле* (Moscow 1965), p. 18.

¹⁶ On the religious aspect of this concept, which was after all exercised at Athens in an *ecclesia*, cf. G. Kittel, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* V (Stuttgart 1954), pp. 869 ff. (H Schlier).

¹⁷ The point is reiterated by Cassiodorus in 509 A.D. (*Var.* I. 27. 5): *quorum* [i.e. that of the *gaudens populus* in the Circus] *garrulitas si patienter excipitur, ipsos quoque principes ornare monstratur.* *Garrulitas populi* = Pindar's λάβρος στρατός, *Py.* 2. 87.

¹⁸ Γερήνιος ἱππότα Νέστωρ, *Il.* II. 336. "The title [i.e. Γερήνιος] is evidently so old that the real meaning of it had been lost in prehistoric times" (W. Leaf, *ad loc.*).

¹⁹ *Oh gran bontà de' cavallieri antichi!* O. F. I. 22.

This double aspect of horse and man is classically illustrated on the Parthenon marbles, where on the one hand we find the Battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs, and on the other the young knights of Athens assuming their energetic role in the Panathenaic procession. Again, we can trace the battle back to Homer, where it began its long life throughout antiquity as the model of improper social ("political") behavior,²⁰ and again, centuries later, Cicero would invoke a complex of motifs already deployed by Pindar to prove the stupidity and immorality of a political opponent.²¹ The horsey Centaurs, who could not hold their wine, were evidently fools who verged too far into folly ("horseplay"). Yet the double aspect is once more evident. The wise Centaur Chiron was the tutor of Asclepius and Achilles in the art of healing.

Though the reminder of that might seem small comfort to the nephritic king to whom Pindar retailed a version of the story,²² it is possible to guess a reason why this myth was appropriate to and perhaps even appreciated by a ruler sick to death. An article written as long ago as 1914²³ traces the importance of the horse in beliefs connected with the dead. Already in the sixth century B.C. the dead man, originally represented as a horse, became a horse's rider, evidently riding to some kind of immortality. We can find some trace of these old ideas in the myth of the athlete riders Castor and Pollux, who take turns to rise from their earthly repose to share the divine life of Olympus.²⁴ The two heroes also visit human banquets, in a version of the *refrigerium* or *rinresco*, at which the dead partake of an earthly meal. This too is a Pindaric theme.²⁵

Yet Pindar also tells the story of Bellerophon, who vainly tried on his winged horse Pegasus to ascend to Olympus.²⁶ A ruler therefore who allows himself to be portrayed on horseback is making bold religious and metaphysical statements and, since the ultimate religious and metaphysical statement is comic,²⁷ inevitably assuming many risks. One such risk is that of looking like a Centaur, a theme explored by Statius in the characterization of Adrastus in the *Thebaid*.²⁸ It is not clear when such equestrian

²⁰ *Od.* XIX. 295 ff.: in general, K. Biellahewek, "Gastmahls- und Symposionslehren bei griechischen Dichtern," *Wiener Studien* 58 (1940), 11-30.

²¹ *In Pis.* 10. 22: *Fortunae rotam, Centaurorum convivium*.

²² *Py.* 3: cf. *Iliad* XI. 830-32.

²³ L. Malten, "Das Pferd im Totenglauben," *Jahrbuch des deutschen archäologischen Instituts* 29 (1914), 179 ff. M. Nilsson is skeptical: *Geschichte d. gr. Religion* I (Munich 1955), pp. 382-83. But there is no contradiction between the horse as chthonic and the horse as hippodromic.

²⁴ Pindar, *Py.* 11. 61-64, *Nem.* 10. 55 ff.

²⁵ *Ol.* 3. 34-35.

²⁶ *Ol.* 13. 84; *Isth.* 7. 46.

²⁷ Arridi, Dante, *Paradiso* XXXIII. 126: cf. St. Bernard's *sorridea*, *ibid.* 49.

²⁸ E. g. X. 228, *Pholoes*: cf. II. 563 (of Tydeus), *Pholus*.

statues were introduced,²⁹ but what is clear from the evidence so far presented is that this sort of image could never be in its essence univocal, a truth that Caligula *more suo* may have overemphasized when he made his horse a consul. Hiero of Syracuse was already a "Hellenistic" monarch *avant la lettre*, "king," "lord," "benefactor." It is perhaps significant that we know the name of one of his horses, Pherenikos,³⁰ and of Alexander the Great's Bucephalus. When the latter died after the battle on the Hydaspes (326 B.C.), the king founded on the site the town of Bucephala.

At Rome, Q. Fabius Maximus had set a bronze equestrian statue of himself on the Capitol next to a gigantic statue of Hercules from Tarentum.³¹ Julius Caesar, very much aware of his spiritual debt, had been represented in the Forum Julium on a horse originally made for Alexander.³² But, with the Flavian emperors, this iconography took a new turn. André Grabar writes:

En effet, les exemples byzantins sont précédés de compositions analogues, sur les monuments du Bas-Empire romain qui s'inspirent, à leur tour, de prototypes créés au I^{er} siècle, probablement pour célébrer les victoires des Flaviens. C'est sous le règne de Titus du moins qu'on voit pour la première fois une figure de barbare sous les pieds du cheval galopant de l'empereur. Le barbare fait un geste de supplication, l'empereur l'écrase ou menace de l'écraser sous les sabots de son cheval. Ce type (et ses variantes) créé au I^{er} siècle (ou plutôt transformé, car l'image de l'empereur galopant *sans barbare* a été connue avant) et contemporain du thème précèdent, doit lui aussi probablement son origine à une influence orientale et plus précisément perse.³³

Even such a sobersides as Marcus Aurelius could be seen until recently outdoors in Michelangelo's Campidoglio,³⁴ his image apparently, in its original version, showing him riding down the (symbolically) small figure

²⁹ In Hellenistic Egypt Horus had been shown as a warrior "on horseback, attacking his foe, a crocodile, with a lance, very similar to and possibly the prototype of St. George and the Dragon of the Christian era": Howard Carter, *The Tomb of Tutankhamen* (rev. ed. Excalibur Books 1972), p. 172. Cf. Grabar (above, note 3), vol. 3, pl. 272, "Horus en soldat romain," from Baouît.

³⁰ Cf. Theocritus XVI. 46-47, τιμῆς δὲ καὶ ὠκέες ἔλλαχον ἵπποι, / οἳ σφισιν ἐξ ἱερῶν στεφανηφόροι ἦλθον ἀγώνων, where the honoring of horses victorious in the games seems already to be attributed to Simonides.

³¹ Plutarch, *Fab. Max.* 22. I owe this reference to the kindness of Frances S. Newman. Hercules and bronze horses are also found at St. Mark's, Venice, and St. Vladimir followed this Byzantine fashion, which included in his case the Ascension of Alexander, at Kiev: Grabar, vol. 2, p. 1096.

³² *Cedat equus Latiae qui contra templa Diones / Caesarei stat sede fori; quem traderis ausus / Pellaëo, Lysippe, duci:* Statius, *Silvae* I. 1. 84-86.

³³ *L'Empereur dans l'art byzantin* (Paris 1936), p. 130.

³⁴ The image is familiar, but the photograph in Richard Ellmann's *Oscar Wilde* (New York 1988, following p. 492), taken around Easter in the year of Wilde's death (1900), is not without a certain pathos.

of a bound barbarian chieftain. As Grabar notes, this old motif was also carried forward into Byzantium. An epigram on an image of the Emperor Marcian (450–57) may be compared (A. P. IX. 802, tr. W. R. Paton):

Μορφὴν τήνδ' ὁράας ζωῶ ἐναλίγκιον ἵππῳ,
Μαρκκιανὸν φορέοντι, βροτῶν βασιλῆα γενέθλης·
δεξιτερὴν δ' ἐτάνυσσε, θέοντα δὲ πῶλον ἐπείγει
δυσμενέος καθύπερθεν, ὅτις κεφαλῇ μιν ἀείρει.

Thou seest this shape, like a live horse, carrying Marcian, ruler of the race of men. His right hand is outstretched, and he spurs on the galloping horse above a foeman, who seems to support its weight on his head.

Of the statue of Marcus Aurelius H. W. Janson remarks:

The wonderfully spirited and powerful horse expresses this martial spirit. But the Emperor himself, without weapons or armor, presents a picture of stoic detachment—a bringer of peace rather than a military hero. And so indeed he saw himself and his reign (161–180 A.D.).³⁵

Perhaps, when the captive was still visible under his horse, he illustrated the power of reason to prevail of itself over all its barbaric adversaries. This became completely unintelligible to the (western) Middle Ages³⁶—but not so much because the icon left men unmoved, as because it worked too strongly on Christian imaginations. We can see from a Saxon example that it fascinated, for example, the contemporaries of King Æthelbald of Mercia in the English Midlands, buried at Repton in A.D. 757.³⁷ In 1979, in a pit outside the east end of St. Wystan's Church there, once the royal mausoleum, an extraordinary relief came to light. The stone was part of the shaft of a tall cross, more particularly of the projection on the top, to which the cross-finial was fastened. The front face bears the figure of a mounted warrior, wearing a mail shirt over a pleated kilt, and brandishing a large sword and a small round shield or target. He has a luxuriant mustache, and is turned to face the viewer.³⁸ On the one preserved side, a monster with a humanoid head and a serpent body is shown with its mouth engulfing the

³⁵ *A History of Art* (new ed. London 1977), p. 174. The *locus classicus* is of course in Schramm, p. 151 (see the following note).

³⁶ Percy Ernst Schramm, *Das Herrscherbild in der Kunst des frühen Mittelalters* (Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg II, 1, 1922–23 [repr. Nendeln / Liechtenstein 1967]), p. 153; E. R. Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (Bern 1948), p. 409.

³⁷ Martin Biddle and Birthe Kjølbye-Biddle, "The Repton Stone," *Anglo-Saxon England* 14 (1985), 233–92.

³⁸ This was characteristic of Byzantine emperors. Cf. "Dish with The Triumph of the Emperor Constantius II" (late fourth century), plate 1 in Alice Bank (above, note 5) with her commentary on p. 271. The so-called Barberini ivory (R. Browning, *Justinian and Theodora* [New York 1971], p. 34) shows a front-facing emperor, probably either Anastasius or Justinian, at his *adventus*, seated on his horse, while a general bears a statuette of Victory. M. McCormick (above, p. 216) notes that this pose was avoided in the iconography of Carolingian lead seals: not apparently in Mercia.

heads of two human figures, who stand on the coils of the body with their arms around each other's waists.

The finders argue for an eighth-century date for the monument and suggest that "the Repton rider takes his place naturally in the development of the equestrian ruler statue from late antiquity to the early Middle Ages".³⁹

The sequence for present purposes begins with the statue of Marcus Aurelius now on the Capitol. . . . These are the elements basic to most late Roman and early Byzantine imperial equestrian statues, and are present in slightly differing ways in *adventus* scenes such as those on the Belgrade cameo. . . , the Szilágy-Somlyó medallion and the Barberini diptych. . . . When Justinian erected a huge equestrian statue of himself in Constantinople in 542-3 it still showed, and was seen by Procopius and later writers to show, those same elements of stern and effective yet humane authority which Statius had seen in the statue of Marcus Aurelius.⁴⁰

Since the time of Diocletian, however, the eastern enemies of Rome had begun to influence the fashions of the imperial court. In the third quarter of the fourth century the imperial equestrian figure of Constantius II on the Kertch dish . . . shows that ninety-degree turn to the front . . . which can already be seen in the third century in the relief . . . of the Sassanid King Sapor I (241-72). . . .

It is into this sequence, but much nearer to Constantius II on the Kertch dish than to the emperor of the Bamberg silk, that the Repton rider fits so well.⁴¹

Earlier, the writers take up the question of the serpent's symbolism:

If meaning is sought, the most likely interpretation of this face would seem to be that it represents the mouth of hell. . . . The fallen angels on fol. 2 of the Old English Hexateuch (London, British Library, Cotton Claudius B. iv), a manuscript of the second quarter of the eleventh century, are . . . violently cast down and uneager, but the hell-mouth towards which they fall is represented not simply as a monstrous head, but as a dragon with legs and a long, coiled, serpent-like body. The illuminations of this manuscript, as has long been recognized, are derived at least in part from late antique or Greek manuscripts, and some of the pictures, including the fall of the rebel angels, are also inspired by Anglo-Saxon literary tradition.⁴²

Æthelbald's equestrian funerary monument surmounted a tall cross. The Anglo-Saxon sculptor then saw the equestrian ruler as a religious

³⁹ Biddles, 287.

⁴⁰ *Sic.* Actually, Domitian's horse, trampling a stylized Rhine (*Silvae* I. 1. 51), was rather more restrained than Marcus Aurelius', anticipating the later Byzantine tradition (Grabar, *L'Empereur dans l'art byzantin*, p. 48).

⁴¹ Biddles, 287-88, following Schramm, pp. 164 ff.

⁴² Biddles, 278. Cf. Dante, *Inferno* XXXIV, 55-56: Grabar, *L'Empereur dans l'art byzantin*, pp. 43-45.

phenomenon, just as the sculptor of Marcus Aurelius was making a philosophical statement. This supernatural aura must not be overlooked whenever the monarch / horse is in question. The ambivalence— incommensurability with the rational—surrounding the horse / man in the tradition is both comic (“he’s dead, but he won’t lie down”) and religious, again something made quite plain by the komic Pindar at the start of the second *Pythian* (δαίμόνιαι).

It is consistent with this that Byzantine religious art employs the motif, notably in the iconography of St. George.⁴³ The mounted figure of the saint was to become especially popular in the art of medieval Novgorod, along with the equestrian Saints Florus and Laurus. Far earlier, the rock churches of Göreme in Cappadocia, first investigated by Guillaume de Jerphanion, depict the Three Mounted Saints George, Theodore and Demetrius of Orthodox hagiography, and notably St. George⁴⁴ (chapels of St. Basil and St. Barbara). But this image was also pagan. Earlier again, the Temple of Hadrian in Ephesus, on the right as one descends the street of the Curetes, still displays a frieze added in the fourth century, showing an equestrian Androcles killing a wild boar at the foundation of the city.

This immemorial image has about it then a double aspect, partly good and partly bad, comic and tragic, holy and diabolical, natural and supernatural, time-bound and time-free, even though in certain scenes one or other of these double aspects may seem wholly to have driven out or suppressed the other. Sometimes the ambivalence is neatly polarized. At Ephesus, the hero killed a boar. In the Christian icon, as in the Mercian relief, the cowering enemy who has now vanished from Marcus Aurelius’ statue appears in the shape of the dragon, the personification of evil. Æthelbald’s dragon is on a separate side of the stone. St. George’s crouches in the lower right corner of the picture, while the saint occupies the left and center, his spear crossing from left to right, a use of the diagonal to express opposition as old as the Parthenon frieze—or Tutankhamen’s coffer.

Yet in all these instances the lesson was the same. Evidently the mastery of the uncouth creature is the evidence of bravery and virtue, and the example for the Stoic / heroic / Christian soul. In the case of hero, saint

⁴³ See above, p. 316, for St. George in company with Circus scenes. But see also the icon of St. Demetrius (late thirteenth or early fourteenth century) now in the Kremlin Museum, Moscow: Bank, *op. cit.*, plates 262, 263 and her commentary on p. 319.

⁴⁴ The Church of St. George at Belisırma built by Basil Giacoupes, the minister of the Seljuk Sultan Maşut II, and his wife Tamar, presents however the saint standing in frontal view, a reminiscence of Byzantine imperial iconography and an anticipation of Donatello’s sculpture in Or San Michele. Janson, *A History of Art*, p. 382 with figure 490, calls attention only to the kinship of the latter with the St. Theodore on the south transept portals of Chartres, dated to 1215–20. Icons such as those of Saints George and Demetrius (Bank, plate 148: she compares [p. 297] a similar image of St. Demetrius on the bottom of the serpentine vessel in the Treasury of St. Mark) or Boris and Gleb (Schug-Wille, *Art of the Byzantine World*, p. 250) are however also relevant.

and emperor-king, the good and the bad have been divided into two clearly recognizable opposites. When Pindar and the sculptors of the Parthenon used the motif, they also divided it, and its double aspect is represented by two separate images, the Charioteer / Knight and the Centaur. Dürer's engraving *Knight, Death and Devil* (1513), preserved in Boston, completed three years before the first edition of the *Orlando Furioso*, is a later example of this same technique of division. In Byzantine art, the saint's horse and the dragon equally represent a potential for good or ill.

But what if the double aspect is contained in the one image? The smiling Can Grande on his horse in Verona, of unknown authorship but dated to 1330, shows that this schizophrenia or double apprehension (really, comic twinning⁴⁵) may coalesce around a single figure. Again Janson's commentary is relevant:⁴⁶

Among the latter [Italian Gothic tombs], the most remarkable perhaps is the monument of Can Grande della Scala, the lord of Verona. A tall structure built out-of-doors next to the church of Sta. Maria Antica, it consists of a vaulted canopy housing the sarcophagus and surmounted by a truncated pyramid which in turn supports an equestrian statue of the deceased. . . . The ruler, astride his richly caparisoned mount, is shown in full armor, sword in hand, as if he were standing on a windswept hill at the head of his troops; and, in a supreme display of self-confidence, he wears a broad grin. Clearly, this is no Christian Soldier, no crusading knight, no embodiment of the ideals of chivalry, but a frank glorification of power. Can Grande, remembered today mainly as the friend and protector of Dante, was indeed an extraordinary figure; although he held Verona as a fief from the German emperor, he styled himself "the Great Khan," thus asserting his claim to the absolute sovereignty of an Asiatic potentate. His free-standing equestrian statue—a form of monument traditionally reserved for emperors—conveys the same ambition in visual terms.

In this analysis, several points are important:

1. The statue (like that of King Æthelbald) is a funeral monument, in this case to a "Great Khan." Under Khan Batu the Tatars, including many Mongol and Turkic elements, had reached the Adriatic in 1241. In 1246 Plano Carpini had visited them and described their military might. Marco Polo lived in Tartary at the court of the Great Khan from 1275–92.⁴⁷ Can Grande's statue seems to embody heady and primitive ideas for Trecento Italy, but they were not so much novel as the revival (with Turkish aid?) of old and forgotten traditions.
2. It is raised. That of King Æthelbald surmounted a tall cross.

⁴⁵ M. Bakhtin, *Проблемы Поэтики Достоевского* (Moscow 1963), pp. 38–39, 282 ff. The classic study is by Sigmund Freud, "Über den Gegensinn der Urworte," *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. VIII (repr. London 1948), pp. 213 ff.

⁴⁶ *A History of Art*, pp. 318–19 with figure 438.

⁴⁷ B. Pares, *A History of Russia* (repr. London 1955), pp. 81–82.

3. It is next to a church, again like that of the King.
4. It stands on a truncated pyramid supported by a vaulted canopy.
5. The figure is smiling.

Can Grande therefore signified his survival by an equestrian statue rising above a pyramid⁴⁸ and above the vault of heaven. His smile is not to be dismissed as one of self-confident complacency. Did the patron of Dante's *Comedy* not understand the cosmological and eschatological significance of laughter? Can Grande's broad grin is his claim to transcend death by accepting the comic. This is more but not less than Christian, and a re-assertion of the element of humor found earlier in Homer's long-lived Nestor. What deeper wells of pre-logical thought all this may plumb can only be guessed.

III. Pushkin's Медный Всадник

"Asiatic" is a term often applied by nineteenth-century liberals to the more distasteful aspects of the Russian despotism. But those more attuned to old ambivalences were not so hasty in their judgments. A. S. Pushkin's *Медный Всадник* (*The Bronze Horseman*, 1833) is the proof of that. The liberal who seeks for some univocal condemnation of Russian imperial power as embodied in this image will find it in Adam Mickiewicz.⁴⁹ He will not find it in the Russian. The poet has certainly turned the static into the fluid, the tranquil contemplation of the imperial icon into a kinetic nightmare. But he is great enough to retain some of the old ambiguity, so that it cannot be said that his compassion stifles his feeling for the majesty of empire. Pushkin's Evgenii, the sentimental but degenerate descendant of a once noble family, now a lowly civil servant, is a variant of the cowering barbarian beneath the hooves of Marcus Aurelius or Marcian. He goes mad because he lacks the vision of Peter the Great, described in powerful lines as the poem opens, when the Czar stands at the mouth of the desolate Neva and decrees that here is to be Russia's window on Europe. The struggle with the elements is too much for him. The onset of his madness is signalled by laughter.⁵⁰ His threat to the Bronze Horseman plunges him even further into a delirium in which he hears the statue in pursuit. Eventually his body is found "at the threshold" (II. 219) of a happiness denied.

⁴⁸ *Regalique situ Pyramidum altius*. "Some late Etruscan urns show three markers on a high platform, the whole evidently serving as a funerary monument": Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, p. 255. There were "Pyramides" at the festival held in honor of the circumcision ("rite de passage") of the son of Murad III in 1582: B. Lewis, *Istanbul and the Civilization of the Ottoman Empire* (Norman, Oklahoma 1963), p. 138. Compare *pyramides*, Biddles, 283.

⁴⁹ Cf. Czeslaw Milosz, *The History of Polish Literature* (Berkeley 1983), pp. 224-25, who acknowledges Pushkin's "ambivalence" (p. 225) quite frankly.

⁵⁰ Захихотал, part II, line 65.

But although the Czar is brought into association in this way with laughter and madness, the poet's admiration for the imperial achievement is quite clear. Люблю тебя, Петра творенье ("I love you, creation of Peter"), he cries in a famous passage (*Vstuplenie*, 43 ff.). And again (84 ff.):

Красуйся, град Петров, и стой,
Неколебимо, как Россия.
Да умирится же с тобой
И побежденная стихия;
Вражду и плен старинный свой
Пусть волны финские забудут
И тщетной злобою не будут
Тревожить вечный сон Петра!

Exult, city of Peter, and stand unshaken, like Russia. Let even the conquered element be reconciled with you. Let the Finnish waves [of the river Neva] forget their old hatred and captivity, nor with vain malice disturb Peter's eternal sleep.

The motif of the guardian lions, twice mentioned in the poem (I. 128; II. 140), is as old as the Lion Gate at Mycenae, itself the descendant of Hittite practice.⁵¹ And the Hittites of course were settled in Asia Minor (Anadolu). Yet, in spite of this evocation of the symbols of ancient "Asiatic" kingship, obviously there is ambiguity, since the interpretations of the poem have varied so widely, corrupted in part by the desire to make Pushkin a liberal because he was the enemy of despotism. But the poet's maripose manner is too elusive to be fixed by these unfeeling literary-entomological pins. Least of all can this poem be adduced as evidence that the first poem of Statius' *Silvae* must be interpreted univocally. Pushkin is not a politician.⁵²

A few years later (1842), in a development of the ancient and Pindaric chariot-of-state motif, N. V. Gogol' envisages Russia itself as a troika, coursing over the steppe:

Не так ли и ты, Русь, что бойкая необгонимая тройка несешь?
Дымом дымится под тобою дорога, гремят мосты, все отстает и
остается позади. Остановился пораженный божьим чудом
созерцатель: не молния ли это, сброшенная с неба? что
значит это наводящее ужас движение? и что за неведомая
сила заключена в сих неведомых светом конях? Эх, кони, кони,
что за кони! Вихри ли сидят в ваших гривах? Чуткое ли ухо
горит во всякой вашей жилке? Зашлышали с вышины знакомую
песню, дружно и разом напрягли медные груди и, почти не

⁵¹ Janson, p. 74 with figure 91 (Bogazköy, c. 1400 B.C.).

⁵² See my discussion "Pushkin's 'Bronze Horseman' and the Epic Tradition," *Comparative Literature Studies* IX (1972), 173-95. The reader will wish to contrast F. M. Ahl's essay in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II. 32. 1 (1984), esp. pp. 91-102.

тронув копытами земли, превратились в одни вытянутые линии, летящие по воздуху, и мчится вся вдохновенная богом! ... Русь, куда ж несешься ты, дай ответ? Не дает ответа. Чудным звоном заливаются колокольчик; гремит и становится ветром разорванный в куски воздух; летит мимо все, что ни есть на земле, и, косясь, постораниваются и дают ей дорогу другие народы и государства.

Are you too, Russia, not borne along like a lively troika, not to be overtaken? The path smokes beneath you, bridges ring, everything stands out of the way and will be left behind. The onlooker halts, struck by the divine miracle. Is this lightning, hurled from heaven? What does this movement mean that inspires horror? What unknown force is enclosed in these horses unknown to the world? Ah, horses, horses, what horses! Do whirlwinds sit in your manes? Does a keen ear burn in every one of your veins? They hear from on high a familiar song, readily at once they strain their chests of bronze and, almost without touching the ground with their hooves, they are transformed into single outstretched lines, flying through the air, each flashing under the inspiration of God! ... Russia, whither are you borne, answer me? No answer is given. The bell spills its wonderful sound, the air, torn to pieces, whistles and turns into the wind. Everything on earth flies past, and with sidelong looks other peoples and states move to one side and yield her the road.

Just as in Pushkin's poem, these horses too are of bronze (медные груди). And the eulogy leaves us with a question that is unanswered (не дает ответа). It concludes the First Part of *Dead Souls*, the comic and yet overwhelmingly sad depiction of Russian self-seeking and self-deception (пошлость) in the early nineteenth century.

IV. The Colossal as Religious Statement

The reader already feels in Gogol's Circus image something suprahuman. Falconet's famous statue in St. Petersburg,⁵³ the inspiration of Pushkin's *Bronze Horseman*, was larger than life. This too is an important concept, and in Near Eastern and Egyptian art the colossal statue has a long history. Big statues, like those of Rameses II at Abu-Simbel, impress by their sheer weight, and weight is a notion akin to glory. This was quite well known in the Greco-Roman world, to Apollonius Rhodius, for example, and Statius.⁵⁴

⁵³ He had studied Marcus Aurelius' statue: *Observations sur la statue de Marc-Aurèle* (Lausanne 1781): Schramm, p. 152, note 19.

⁵⁴ Botterweck, Ringgren, Fabry, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament* IV (Stuttgart 1984), s. vv. *kabed* and *kabod*, cols. 13 ff., 23 ff. Cf. *Iliad* V. 838–39; Ap. Rhod., *Arg.* II. 679–80; *Schol. Ap. Rhod.* I. 1289–91a (p. 116, Wendel); Virgil, *Aen.* VI. 413; Ovid, *Met.* XV. 693–94; Lucan, *Phars.* I. 57; Statius, *Thebaid* VII. 750: H. Cancik, *Untersuchungen zur lyrischen Kunst des P. Papinius Statius* (Hildesheim 1965), pp. 93–94. Swift notes in the style of the Emperor of Lilliput, "whose Feet press down to the Center, and whose Head strikes against the Sun" (*Gulliver's Travels* [1735; repr. New York 1977], p. 29).

But already Alexander's artists had offered to carve Mount Athos into a likeness of the king so big that it would hold an entire town in its right hand. "He's got the whole world in his hand," the theme of a Negro Spiritual in debt to the Hebrew Psalms, would here have been realized quite literally.⁵⁵ The Hellenistic motif of the large statue is exploited at Rome by Ennius to flatter the Elder Scipio (*Varia* 1) and guyed by Plautus (*Curc.* 139–40, 439 ff.).⁵⁶ The suggestion of the colossal in these early authors is quite unmistakable later, for example, when Propertius echoes the theme in flattering Augustus (II. 10. 21–24):

Ut caput in magnis ubi non est tangere signis,
Ponitur hic imos ante corona pedes,
sic nos nunc, inopes laudis conscendere culmen,
pauperibus sacris vilia tura damus.

The reign of Augustus is not to be exempted from the long history and flux of ancient ideas about the divine ruler, the god-king.

V. Justinian as Bronze Horseman

Colossal statues of the emperors were familiar in Asia Minor, and the head of Constantine preserved in the Campidoglio is proof that this tradition was alive for the founder of New Rome. Constantine's colossal statue had stood outside his basilica in Old Rome. More interestingly for the reader of Statius and Pushkin, in the central square of New Rome, the so-called Augustaeion, redesigned after the destruction caused by the Nika riots, stood a column bearing a colossal equestrian bronze statue of the Emperor Justinian.⁵⁷ C. Mango notes the fame of this image:

This column came to be regarded as one of the wonders of Constantinople, and there exists a vast body of evidence concerning it, since every medieval visitor of the City—be he a Russian pilgrim, an Arab, or a Crusader—made a point of describing it for the benefit of "the folks at home." Even after the column had been pulled down by the Turks, it continued to be represented on Russian icons.⁵⁸

A page from a fourteenth-century manuscript of the medieval Bulgarian translation of the verse *Chronicle* of Constantine Manasses (twelfth

⁵⁵ E. Norden, *Antike Kunstprosa* (repr. Stuttgart 1958), p. 838, notes a rhyming inscription in iambs from Aualeia in Pisidia referring to the *χείρ μόναρχος* of Leo IV (775–780). Cf. Herodotus VIII. 140 β *χείρ ὑπερμήκης* of Xerxes, over a thousand years before. Pompey's *dextera invicta* (Cicero, *Verrine* V. 58. 153) is in the same vein, and Pompey, the builder of Rome's first permanent theatre (inspired, according to Plutarch, *Life of Pompey* 43, by the sight of the theatre at Miletus), would serve with distinction in the East. Cf. Cancik, pp. 62–63.

⁵⁶ Again the double, serio-comic aspect.

⁵⁷ See the article by J. Raby, above, 305 ff.

⁵⁸ *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312–1453* (repr. Toronto 1986), p. 57.

century),⁵⁹ now in the Vatican, shows Justinian looking at St. Sophia from the Augustaion. In the center, adjoined therefore by the Baths of Zeuxippus, the Senate House, the Imperial Palace, the Church and the Hippodrome, the column crowned by his equestrian statue is quite clearly visible. In medieval Russia, the *Letter to Cyril of Tver* of Epifanii the Wise, written about 1415, requests:

Delineate for me Justinian, as he is called, sitting on horseback and holding in his right hand a brazen apple which, they say, is so big and capacious that it would hold two and a half pails of water.⁶⁰

Justinian's contemporary Procopius writes (*De Aed.* I. 2. 5–12):

'Εν δὲ τοῦ κίνου τῇ κορυφῇ χαλκοῦς ἔστηκεν ὑπερμεγεθὺς ἵππος, τετραμμένος πρὸς ἔω, θέαμα λόγου πολλοῦ ἄξιον. ἔοικε δὲ βαδιονμένῳ καὶ τοῦ πρόσω λαμπρῶς ἔχομένῳ. ποδῶν τῶν προσθίων ἀμέλει τὸν μὲν ἀριστερὸν μετεωρίζει, ὡς ἐπιβησόμενον τῆς ἐπιπροσθεν γῆς, ὁ δὲ δὴ ἕτερος ἐπὶ τοῦ λίθου ἡρείρεται,⁶¹ οὗ ὑπερθὲν ἔστιν, ὡς τὴν βάσιν ἐκδεξόμενος· τοὺς δὲ ὀπισθίους οὕτω ξυνάγει ὡς, ἐπειδὴ τὸ μὴ ἐστήξειν αὐτοῖς ἐπιβάλλοι, ἐν ἐτοίμῳ εἶναι. τούτῳ δὴ τῷ ἵππῳ χαλκῇ ἐπιβέβηκε τοῦ βασιλέως εἰκὼν, κολοσσωδὲς ἐμφερής. ἔσταλται δ' Ἀχιλλεὺς ἡ εἰκὼν. οὕτω γάρ τὸ σχῆμα καλοῦσιν ὅπερ ἀμπέχεται. τὰς τε γὰρ ἀρβύλας ὑποδέδεται καὶ τὰ σφυρά ἐστι κνημίδων χωρίς. εἴτα ἡρωϊκῶς τεθωράκισται καὶ κράνος αὐτῷ τὴν κεφαλὴν σκέπει δόξαν ὡς κατασειοίτο παρεχόμενον, αἶγλη⁶² τέ τις ἐνθὲνδε αὐτοῦ ἀπαστράπτει. φαίη τις ἂν ποιητικῶς εἶναι τὸν ὀπωρινὸν ἐκείνον ἀστέρα.⁶³ βλέπει δὲ πρὸς ἀνίσχοντά που τὸν ἥλιον, τὴν ἡνιόχησιν ἐπὶ Πέρσας, οἶμαι, ποιούμενος. καὶ φέρει μὲν χειρὶ τῇ λαίᾳ πόλον, παραδηλὼν ὁ πλάστης ὅτι γῇ τε αὐτῷ καὶ θάλασσά δεδούλωται πᾶσα. ἔχει δὲ οὔτε ξίφος οὔτε δοράτιον οὔτε ἄλλο τῶν ὅπλων οὐδέν, ἀλλὰ σταυρὸς αὐτῷ ἐπὶ τοῦ πόλου

⁵⁹ Reproduced in R. Browning, *Justinian and Theodora* (above, note 38, p. 113. Professor Browning kindly informs me that the original is Vat. Sl. 2 fol. 109^v).

⁶⁰ Mango, p. 257. Actually, the orb ("apple") was in Justinian's left hand, according to Procopius, but the Russian hagiographer has been misled by the symbolic importance of the right hand ("dextera Domini fecit virtutem") into substituting that. Although Schramm interprets (p. 158, note 39a) the orb as originally the attribute of Zeus, one is reminded by Epifanii's irreverence of the biped Centauress preserved in the Antiquarium at Taormina and adopted as its civic emblem by the city, holding in her right hand what may be a love-apple of heroic proportions. It is visible on the fountain in the Piazza Municipio. Compare the ball promised by Aphrodite to Eros (Apollonius, *Arg.* III. 132 ff.), which she describes as Διὸς περικαλλὲς ἄθυρμα, though now it is evidently in her gift.

⁶¹ The form is presumably modelled on Homer's ἡρήρειστο (e.g. *Il.* III. 357, διὰ θῶρηκος πολυδαίδαλον ἡρήρειστο), and in final position like this is already intended to give some epic air to the description. A. Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin*, actually reads ἡρήρειστα (p. 46, note 4).

⁶² Αἰγλάεντα . . . κόσμον, Pindar, *Py.* 2. 10 (cf. αἶγλα διόσδοτος, *Py.* 8. 96): πάντοθεν αἰγλήεις, A. P. XVI. 65. 4.

⁶³ Cf. *Iliad* XXII. 26–29.

ἐπίκειται, δι' οὗ δὴ μόνου τὴν τε βασιλείαν καὶ τὸ τοῦ πολέμου πεπόρισται κράτος. προτεινόμενος δὲ χεῖρα τὴν δεξιὰν ἐς τὰ πρὸς ἀνίσχοντα ἥλιον καὶ τοὺς δακτύλους διαπετάσας ἐγκελεύεται τοῖς ἐκείνη βαρβάροις καθῆσθαι οἴκοι καὶ μὴ πρόσω ἵεναι.

On top of the column stands a huge bronze horse, facing east, forming an imposing monument. It seems on the verge of moving, and grasping firm hold of what lies ahead. Its left forefoot is raised, as if to step onto the earth before it, the other is fixed upon its pediment, to support its movement. Its hind legs are gathered so as to be ready when their turn comes for action. The horse's rider is a bronze effigy of the emperor, of colossal size. The garb is that of Achilles—that is the name of the costume he is wearing. It includes boots, but no greaves for the ankles. He has a hero's breastplate, and a helmet protecting his head that looks as if it might shake off, and this is the source of the brilliance that streams from him. One might quote Homer's phrase about the autumn star. His looks are directed towards the rising sun, as if he were riding against the Persians. In his left hand he has an orb, the sculptor's intention being to indicate that he is lord of all the earth and sea. He carries no sword, spear or other weapon, but a cross surmounts his orb, for it is through this alone that he has won his royal power and victory in war. His right hand is stretched towards the east, its fingers outspread, in a gesture of command to the barbarians there to stay safely at home and to advance no further.⁶⁴

Some points emerge about this Constantinopolitan Bronze Horseman:

1. It is both raised and of colossal size.
2. Its right hand appears to be threatening the Persians in the East.
3. It stands near a church and a Circus.
4. It is about to take off into another dimension, that of motion.
5. It is a resurrection of Achilles.
6. Epiphanius the Wise makes fun of the orb, calling it a brazen apple.
7. According to other evidence,⁶⁵ it had a spring at its base, later enlarged after the conquest.
8. It was awe-inspiring even to the Turks, and in general was regarded as having religious or even quasi-magical properties.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Mango offers a briefer excerpt (p. 110). He also adduces (pp. 111–13) the *Ekphrasis of the Augustaion* (late thirteenth century) of Georgius Pachymeres. Cf. in general, P. Friedlaender, *Johannes von Gaza und Paulus Silentarius: Kunstbeschreibungen justinianischer Zeit* (Leipzig 1912).

⁶⁵ Raby, 306, note 2; 308; 311, note 16. Hence the importance of the Lacus Curtius, described as adjacent to Domitian's statue by Statius (*Silvae* I. 1. 66 ff.; cf. *palus*, 76), and of the flooding Neva in Pushkin's Медный Всадник.

⁶⁶ Raby, 305, 311–12.

The *Greek Anthology* also seems to describe another equestrian statue of Justinian, this time actually in the Hippodrome (XVI. 62, translation adapted from W. R. Paton):

Ταῦτά σοι, ὦ βασιλεῦ Μηδοκτόνε, δῶρα κομίζει
 σῆς Ῥώμης γενέτης καὶ πάϊς Εὐστάθιος,
 πῶλον ὑπὲρ νίκης, Νίκην στεφανηφόρον ἄλλην,
 καὶ σὲ μετηνεμίφ πάλῳ ἐφεζόμενον.
 ὑψός, Ἰουστινιανέ, τεδὸν κράτος· ἐν χθονὶ δ' αἰεὶ
 δεσμός ἔχοι Μήδων καὶ Σκυθέων προμάχους.

These gifts, O King, slayer of the Persians, are brought to thee by Eustathius, the father and son of thy Rome: a horse for thy victory, another laurelled Victory, and thyself seated on the horse swift as the wind. Up with thy might, Justinian, but may the champions of the Persians and Scythians ever lie in chains on the ground.

The next epigram may be compared (XVI. 63, adapted from Paton):

Πῶλον ὁμοῦ καὶ ἄνακτα καὶ ὀλλυμένην Βαβυλῶνα
 χαλκὸς ἀπὸ σκύλων ἔπλασεν Ἀσσυρίων.
 ἔστι δ' Ἰουστινιανός, ὃν Ἀντολῆς ζυγὸν ἔλκων
 στήσεν Ἰουλιανός, μάρτυρα Μηδοφόνον.

The bronze from the Assyrian spoils moulded the horse and the monarch and Babylon perishing. This is Justinian, whom Julianus, controlling the yoke of Anatolia, erected, his own witness to the slaying of the Persians.

VI. Domitian as Bronze Horseman

Byzantine art therefore provides an indispensable link between past and future, Statius in Old Rome and Pushkin in the realm of the Third Rome; for between Julius Caesar and Marcus Aurelius, before Justinian and Peter the Great, stands Domitian's colossal equestrian statue, which can only be understood as part of this same peculiar sequence.⁶⁷ No doubt the statue itself was meant as a piece of imperial propaganda, but what kind of statement was it making? Domitian's father and brother had built the Colosseum, named after a destroyed colossal image of Nero that once stood on the site, and Martial shows how much the imagery of the Circus

⁶⁷ Procopius actually says that Justinian bore a physical resemblance to Domitian (*Anecdota* VIII. 13 ff.)—a piece of satirical malice that may however conceal a deeper truth about Domitian's proto-Byzantine inclinations, and on the other side about Justinian's traditionalism. Some observations on the rhetorical / anathematic background are to be found in A. Hardie, *Statius and the Silvae* (Liverpool 1983), pp. 131–32. Paul Holberton reminds me that Statius' poem is actually picked up again by Pomponius Gauricus, *De Sculptura* (1504: edd. A. Chastel and R. Klein, Geneva-Paris 1969): cf. p. 55 and n. 64. Gauricus himself made a bronze horseman (perhaps only a medal) inspired by the concept of ἀμφιβολία or ambiguity (p. 199). This was suggested by Pliny (*N. H.* XXXV. 59, *dubitatur*) with reference to an equestrian painting (so Gauricus) by Polygnotus.

pervaded Domitian's reign. Was Statius' celebration of the emperor's statue at the opening of the *Silvae* a spoof? And if it was a spoof, is that inconsistent with the whole concept of the knightly ruler? Is it a question of either / or?

For the first time in literature in the first poem of the *Silvae* Statius has united the old idea of the colossal with the old idea of the "knightly" ruler. This is the immense importance of the theme, and explains its position in the collection. It opens a book that ends with Phalaecian hendecasyllables on a Saturnalian feast celebrated in the amphitheatre, just as Justinian's equestrian statue stood near the entrance to the Hippodrome. None of this is any more fortuitous than Can Grande's grin.

Some lines of the poem may be quoted (2-16):

caelone peractum	
fluxit opus? Siculis an conformata caminis	
effigies lassum Steropen Brontenque reliquit?	
an te Palladiae talem, Germanice, nobis	5
effinxere manus qualem modo frena tenentem	
Rhenus et attoniti vidit domus ardua Daci?	
nunc age fama prior notum per saecula nomen	
Dardanii miretur equi cui vertice sacro	
Dindymon et caesis decrevit frondibus Ide.	10
hunc neque discissis cepissent Pergama muris;	
nec grege permixto pueri innuptaeque puellae,	
ipse nec Aeneas nec magnus duceret Hector.	
adde quod ille nocens saevosque amplexus Achivos,	
hunc mitis commendat eques. iuvat ora tueri	15
mixta notis belli placidamque gentia pacem.	

Is this a work of art made in heaven and drifted down to earth? Was this image shaped on Etna's anvils, wearying the Cyclopes? Was it Athena's hands that fashioned you in this guise for us, Caesar, such as the Rhine and the lofty home of the thunderstruck Dacian witnessed you but now, bridle in hand? Old legend may be content to admire the long-lasting fame of the Trojan Horse, for whose sake Dindymon lost its hallowed top and Ida was shorn of her woods. But Troy could never have contained this horse even with her walls thrown wide, no boys and unwedded maids in mingled throng have drawn it inside, not even Aeneas or mighty Hector. That horse was treacherous, the lair of the savage Greeks; this its gentle rider recommends. How good to see that face marked indeed by the features of war, but mingling with them those of tranquil peace.

Some details of the poem may now be listed and annotated:

1. *Caelone peractum / fluxit opus* (2-3): This whole opening passage (2-16), in which the poet finds the divine at work in the suprahuman image, may be compared with the end of *Dead Souls*, and with Procopius' evocation of Justinian's αἰγλή and of Achilles. Pindar's

second *Pythian* had led the way (μεγαλοπόλεις, δαιμόνιοι, αἰγλάεντα κόσμον).

Mitis eques here (15; cf. *mitior*, 25), recalls the theme of Hiero's "gentleness" in Pindar (ἀγαναΐσιν ἐν χερσὶ, *Py.* 2. 8). Both Marcus Aurelius and Justinian would be ostentatiously unarmed. There is nothing inherently polemical about the reminiscences of the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*. These are the canonical Greek and Roman statements of the heroic ideal.

2. *Par operi sedes* (22 ff.): The statue is near the Temple of Quirinus (the deified Romulus) and the Julian basilica. Since death in one shape or another could be taken for granted, it promises therefore immortality. Its head overlooks temples (32–33), exactly as Justinian overlooked Hagia Sophia.
3. *Dextra vetat pugnare* (37): Alexander's hand has already attracted our attention. The "right hand of the Lord" is familiar from the Bible. Here it brings peace, like Pompey's in Cicero's Fifth *Verrine* (§153), another religious idea. Justinian's right hand was equally visible, but by contrast it threatened war. This motif also recurs twice in Pushkin's *Bronze Horseman* (I. 162; II. 190), though the hand is not specified.
4. The horse is on the verge of galloping (*cursumque minatur*, 47): Again, this is exactly like Justinian's horse. Pushkin would make this motif actual.
5. *Vacuae pro cespite terrae / aerea captivi crinem terit ungula Rheni* (50–51): Marcus Aurelius once had a captive beneath his horse's hooves. This Flavian theme,⁶⁸ already noted in Egyptian art and in the statue of the Emperor Marcian, is akin to the Psalmist's: *Dixit Dominus domino meo, 'Sede a dextris (!) meis, donec ponam inimicos tuos scabellum pedum tuorum.'*⁶⁹ It progresses towards Pushkin's Evgenii.
6. *Pondere* (56): see note 54 above on *kabod*.
7. The epiphany of Curtius from the Lacus Curtius (66 ff.) is set up by the typical device of an enquiring (lesser) deity puzzled by the action of another,⁷⁰ but the fact that this guardian spirit springs from the lower world is an essential part of the same Roman mentality that opened the

⁶⁸ Grabar, *L'Empereur dans l'art byzantin*, p. 130, quoted above, p. 320.

⁶⁹ OT Ps. 110:1 (compare 66:12 for the worm's eye view). Cf. E. Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford 1957), p. 161; Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* II (repr. Oxford 1962), p. 412 ad v. 907; McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, p. 58, note 76, on the history of the *calcatio colli*, already known to Propertius (I. 1. 4); Grabar, *L'Empereur dans l'art byzantin*, p. 129, on Ps. 91:13.

⁷⁰ The inspiration was no doubt Callimachus, fr. 288, Pf., but this became a topos variously amplified in the Roman eulogy: Claudian, *Prob. Olyb.* 73 ff.; Sidonius, *Pan. Anth.* II. 318 ff., *Pan. Maioriani* 53 ff., *Pan. Aviti* 45 ff.

shrine of Consus at the *meta* of the Circus.⁷¹ In the celebration, death loses its terrors, and becomes instead the renewer of life, the source of resurrection.⁷²

8. *Cedat* (84): The *cedat* topos, so engrained in the Roman attitude to the world, is also at work in various guises at 8 ff., 18 ff., 27 ff., 39, 52 ff. It is particularly well known from Roman comedy and Martial,⁷³ but it was also known in Byzantium,⁷⁴ and Justinian's "Solomon, I have surpassed thee" is part of the same concept.
9. The image conquers time (91 ff.): This was already hinted at in the allusion to the Trojan Horse. It is part of the suspension of time that characterizes the carnival.⁷⁵
10. Domitian is a second Alexander (100): This too is part of the theme of resurrection, particularly visible in the stories about Nero's reappearance, for example.⁷⁶ Similarly, Justinian was a second Achilles.
11. *Certus ames terras* (105): This theme is already developed by Horace and Virgil. It would later be taken up by Dante.⁷⁷

It is legitimate for the reader to compare some of these points with those emerging from the study of Justinian's statue in the Augustaion (above, p. 330). But a profounder question is whether, even if we could show that Statius had been engaged in mockery of Domitian, that would justify the conclusion that somehow he was "agin' the government," a notion that has done much harm to the appreciation in our time of ancient literary sensibility. Circus freedom was of course, when taken to extremes, an act of sedition. But it was not normally taken to extremes. The more or less good-humored badinage and exchange of comic repartee between ruler and ruled was an admission of the emperor's status, not its denial. The

⁷¹ Above, p. 317. The serpent on King Æthelbald's stone (above, p. 322), representing the mouth of hell, may be compared. Obviously, this was no disrespect to the king.

⁷² K. Meuli, "Der Ursprung der olympischen Spiele," *Ges. Schriften II* (Basel-Stuttgart 1975), pp. 881 ff.; Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, pp. 62, 258-59.

⁷³ Cf. E. Fraenkel, *Elementi plautini in Plauto* (Florence 1960), pp. 7 ff.; O. Weinreich, *Studien zu Martial* (Stuttgart 1928), pp. 30 ff.; E. R. Curtius, *Römische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (Bern 1948), pp. 168-72.

⁷⁴ A. P. IX. 656. 11, εἰς ὃν in praise of the Chalke in the Palace of Anastasius.

⁷⁵ Cf. *Silvae* I. 6. 39 ff. This is why Nestor is *trisaeclesienex*: C. Buechner, *Frag. poet. latin.* (2nd ed. Leipzig 1982), p. 71 (Laevius).

⁷⁶ Expected because of his games: L. Friedlaender, *Darstellungen aus der Sittengeschichte Roms II*, pp. 1-2, citing Dio Chrys., *Or.* 71. 9 ff. (II, 268, Am.); Tac., *Hist.* I. 4; Plutarch, *Otho* 3. This is where the concept of the emperor / charioteer links with that of immortality, as in the Ascension of Alexander (above, notes 3 and 31). The Constantinus of the epigraph to this article (*App. Plan.* 375) was only a charioteer, but it was not for nothing that he bore an imperial name.

⁷⁷ Nisbet and Hubbard on Horace, *Odes* I. 2. 45; Dante, *Vita Nuova* XIX. 7-9; J. K. Newman, *The Classical Epic Tradition* (Madison 1986), p. 257.

location of the statue is significant, not because it provides a chance to portend the end of a repressive regime, but because it guarantees triumph over death in a re-enactment of the patriotic sacrifice of the Curtii. Laughter is part of that same guarantee, as Can Grande knew.

The ruler in every society occupies a religious / comic status, even when (as happened to Domitian and King Æthelbald, and as still happens) he is ritually sacrificed (assassinated). His images necessarily have about them an atmosphere of comedy, sometimes disguised as public rejoicing, sometimes turning to public ridicule.⁷⁸ But even his victimization is the affirmation of his role, not its denial. Roman emperors were surprisingly tolerant of this kind of Circus freedom, and the writers who took advantage of it are not to be regarded as *ipso facto* their political enemies. When Statius exalted the colossal equestrian statue of Domitian, in so many ways the precursor of the Byzantines, he inevitably introduced into his eulogy an ambiguous note, developed more fully in the character of Adrastus in the *Thebaid*. (But in what sense was Adrastus a "bad" ruler?) That was itself an act of homage. Later, when Pushkin commented on a Russian statue in the tradition of Justinian's own image as a Bronze Horseman, he described the cruelty and cost of empire, without however meaning to make that the whole story any more than did the poet who described the encounter of Aeneas and Dido during a hunt, or that earlier poet through whose lips a Sicilian victor in the Hippodrome threatened his adversaries that he would run up on them like a wolf.

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⁷⁸ I cannot help recalling here a cartoon that appeared in an Italian magazine a few years ago. Two horses are contemplating a familiar statue in some provincial piazza. The first remarks: "Allora, questo è il famoso Garibaldi?" The second responds: "Sì, ma chi gli sta a cavallo?" Scholars would do well to read more of this Mediterranean humor before concluding that this is evidence of an undercurrent of resentment against the hero of the Risorgimento.